

HAGGERSTON FOOD CO-OP CLOSED DOWN

A couple of weeks ago the food co-op that was operating from the community flat on Haggerston estate was forced to close down by the local shopkeepers. The shopkeepers, presumably worried about the co-op's threat to their profits, complained to the GLC and threatened a rent strike if the co-op was not closed down. The GLC ordered the co-op to close.

For any tenants trying to set up a food co-op it shows the problems faced are not only those of apathy but also the hostility of local shopkeepers trying to protect their profits. Below we print the story of the food co-op as written by the community worker on the estate; not so much from the point of view of the co-op's closure but of its failures.

THE CO-OP

The Haggerston Food Co-Op was originally started in November 1972 to provide a project that was of benefit to local people, especially OAP's and those on SS., that would be easily manageable by local tenants.

The mechanics of the co-op were simple that large wholesale cases of foodstuffs were bought from cash and carries and bags of vegetables from Spitalfields. These were then sold at the wholesale price to tenants on the estate in smaller quantities. As long as the landlord agrees with such an activity it is perfectly legal. Unfortunately our landlord, the G.L.C., did not. The co-op operated in a ground floor flat given over to tenants as a community centre.

TENANTS' ACTIVITY

The community worker handed the co-op over to the tenants to run as their own project in about December. The mistake was that it was handed over to one tenant who did the job so well that he managed to cope well on his own. The running of the co-op should have been the responsibility of a group, although at that time only one tenant was interested.

Round about the time that Chris Wotton, the co-op organiser, realised that he was to be shortly re-housed, we started to think in terms of involvement from more tenants and the formation of a co-op group. It was also at this time that some of the local shopkeepers led by the baker decided that we were trading unfairly and informed the Shop Inspectors that we were not keeping to the local trading hours. This was not true and the Shop Inspector told us that we were infringing no law



laws. The shopkeepers then realised that the GLC did not allow trading in their property and informed both the local offices and county hall. They also threatened to go on rent strike if we were not closed down. We eventually received orders from the GLC to close down. As the flat on the estate was in use so much for meetings and other activities, we decided either to close down or move to premises off the estate. We just could not afford to lose the flat. Customers and other tenants were told about this but did not seem to care and none offered to help out.

One Saturday we ran a big publicity campaign on the estate informing everyone of the position and about ten people said that they would like to help find a way of continuing the co-op. Eventually we had to literally drag them out of their flats to attend a meeting to deal with both the problem of new management and of finding new premises. At this stage the developments may well have been entirely different, had we already had an involved group running the co-op instead of one individual.

THE CLOSE-DOWN

The eight or ten tenants at the meeting who were supposedly the most concerned on the estate about the closure of the co-op were not interested enough, or prepared to do the necessary work involved. We could not even get anyone to volunteer to explore the possibilities of alternative premises by phone. It appeared that the availability of cheap food was not an important issue to the tenants. The co-op certainly achieved no more than that although it did provide a critical point of contact for the community worker. Not one person has expressed any regret to me that the co-op has closed down. A number of tenants were willing and did help out in the co-op after the meeting but Chris Wotton did not have enough time to show them the ropes, nor did they have enough time to become enthusiastic about it. Hence we were unable to cope with the crisis of losing our premises. A short time ago we closed down making an overall loss of about £10. From my point of view, as the community worker, this does not matter much, both because it did not matter to the tenants and it was not a tenant initiated project. I think it would have closed anyway, when Chris was rehoused, due to the lack of interest.

Peter Chambers.



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HACKNEY PEOPLE'S PRESS HAS OPEN WORKING MEETINGS AT CENTERPRISE, 34 DALSTON LANE EVERY THURSDAY AT 7PM. COME ALONG AND GET INVOLVED - ALL WELCOME.

HACKNEY'S HOMELESS SCANDAL

1. Squatters Taken to Court

On Wednesday, June 6th, some of the trials arising out of the exceptionally violent, unwarranted and illegal eviction at 290 Amhurst Rd., reported in the last issue, took place at Old St Court. 6 people on charges of assault and actual bodily harm were remanded to a later date, as were the cross-summons against the police.

The eviction - it was the second time that day - was completely unexpected, as Mrs Keating, Miss Williams and their supporters had rather naively (we realise in retrospect) felt confident in their legal rights and therefore had not expected the police to intervene - especially since only the month before Sir Robert Mark (Commissioner of Police) had issued a directive to all police reminding them that squatting is a civil matter between landlord and occupier, and that they should not intervene without a court order.

Esme Williams was tried first for Breach of the Peace. She refused to be bound over, since

she said it was the police who had breached the peace. The police covered themselves by saying they had been assisting a builder who was being ejected (nothing said of course about the battering rams and crowbars the police had used) and explained arresting her by saying she'd been trying to stop someone else getting arrested.

Esme showed such surprise at all this being thrown at her that the magistrate (Peter Goldstone) refused to bind her over, but was obviously hard put to do that without discrediting the police. So he quoted a High Court ruling (made the day AFTER the eviction) saying that squatters don't have any rights anyway and that therefore the action of the police had not been illegal.

The next 5 cases of Breach of the Peace all came up together. They also refused to be bound over. The police started their story again about the builder - but when asked by the magistrate if they could produce this man they hummed and hawed about him being out of London.

Some women in the public gallery shouted out that they had seen him that very morning working on the house opposite 290 Amhurst Rd. The defendants refused an adjournment as that would give the prosecution time to tell the builder what to say (what he'd actually been doing the day of the eviction was helping the police smash down the front door). The prosecution had no choice but to drop the charges.

Two more women then came up for obstructing a policeman who was 'keeping the peace' outside the house. They said they were on the pavement trying to see what was happening so they would witness about it, and were pushed away and then dragged off. The police story of course was different - the women were 'obstructing' him carrying out his duty and refused to move when asked many times and warned they would be arrested. The magistrate chose to believe the police and found the two women guilty.

Meanwhile, Anita Keating and Esme Williams, whose eviction caused the original arrests,

have quietly squatted again, this time in an Islington Borough Council house, and they've got the whole street behind them.

Ballough, Chairman of the Second Actel Housing Association which owns the house in Amhurst Rd which they first squatted in, continues his war against the homeless. He is taking 2 of his houses in Albion Rd., Stoke Newington, to Shoreditch County Court on July 10th in an attempt to evict the two women and three children who have been living there since January. They originally squatted there because the conditions in the Council homeless hostel (in Green Lanes) were intolerable, and they had been waiting for nine months to be rehoused.

Now that Second Actel have found the publicity from 13 women being arrested and beaten up by the police at their request embarrassing, they are going back to the courts to attack squatters.

But as long as they leave good houses empty while the queues of

homeless in Hackney are growing, whether they use police, builders, or courts, they'll never win.

2. Homeless Family: 11 moves in eight years

Mrs. Rosemary Ingleby, her husband Brian, their five children and her brother are at present squatting in a house in Culford Road, N1. The house was recently converted by the de Beauvoir Trust, a local housing association, and the Trust is taking them to court to secure an eviction. In the past 8 years, the family has had to move eleven times, mostly from halfway house to halfway house run by Hackney Council, more recently from one squat to another. This is Mrs. Ingleby's story.

« I first went into homeless families accommodation in 1965.

'I went to Drysdale Street (Social Services), and they sent me to Morning Lane reception centre. I spent six months there. I only had one little girl then, although I was expecting another.

MORNING LANE

'It's a big building with numbered rooms, and the rooms are just lined with bunk beds. You had to eat at the right time in a big dining room, or you didn't get any food, and you had to be in by 10.30 at night. My husband wasn't allowed to stay there, and the kids were always in and out of hospital.

'After six months they gave me a place in Paddington, another homeless families block run by Hackney Council. There we had two rooms and kitchen. But after a few months my husband went into prison for getting two lots of social security. The actual sum was £3.9s, but they gave him six months. While he was in prison my eldest boy had a collapsed lung, and they took him into Paddington Green Hospital. I applied for a flat where I could have my own street door.

'Eventually a fellow came from Drysdale St, and they mov-

ed me to Stepney - Beaksbourne Buildings - which is just like Chaucer House. I was there for about 2½ years with the 3 children. At one time I got into arrears, £20, and they promised me if I paid it off they would give me another place. But nobody paid their rent there because nobody ever got moved. In 1968 they moved us to Duncan House, Sheep Lane because Beaksbourne had been taken back by Stepney Council. I was there for nearly a year.

DUNCAN HOUSE

'Whilst I was there some fellows tried to get everybody to go squatting. I got a bit interested in what was going on, and we had some meetings. We decided to go down to the Town Hall to complain about the conditions. At that time there were only 4 dustbins for 104 families. We met the Mayor and the chairman of the Housing Committee. One of the things was that the Council had keys to all the flats and they could just come in when they wanted.

'So the Council decided to improve Duncan House. They put gratings on the windows, which were always broken, and they brought in another 4 dustbins, and some Americans gave some kiddies' concerts. But they didn't improve the flats themselves.

STOKE NEWINGTON

'I got fed up with it in the end, and I decided to go squatting. Some people got a van for us, and we went to Stoke Newington.

I was there for a while. I had to leave because we didn't get on with the neighbours.

'Then we found another squat in Wood Green, and I was there with a friend just up the road. But the Council came round and said we'd have to go. They left

me over Christmas because I was having another baby, and then they got an injunction.

'At the court, the Council said they had a letter from Hackney offering to rehouse us.

DUNCAN HOUSE AGAIN

In the end it turned out to be Duncan House again. I gave up hope, so I decided to go back. I was there for a while, and then they said they were going to rehouse everybody. I was given a flat in Stoke Newington.

'This flat had four bedrooms, but the two attic rooms were so damp that you couldn't use them. There were 44 steps up to it, and I was expecting my sixth baby at the time. One of the boys was in hospital for psychological reasons, and the doctor said I should have a garden. I was paying £5 a week on a mini-cab to take him to a nursery. There wasn't even a place to keep a pram.

'I couldn't stay there, so we found another place to squat, in Bouverie Road. I was just putting the lock on when the police forced their way in and charged us with breaking and entering. We pleaded not guilty and asked for a judge and jury. The judge said the police should never have taken us to court in the first place, and we got off.

MALVERN ROAD

'Meanwhile we'd moved into another squat in Brownswood Rd, Finsbury Park. Some other squatters came and rewired the whole house. Then the Council came round and said it belonged to Homeless Families, which was funny. A week later, a bloke from Morning Lane came and offered us a house. This one was in Malvern Road, on the Mapledene Estate, and they said we could stop there a year and then they would give us a proper place.

'Malvern Rd is part of the Mapledene CPO. There was an empty house next door, and we

had rats everywhere. I went to the Town Hall, and they kept promising us a place, and I got on to the Public Health, the Social Services and the NSPCC. They put some rat poison down, but I wouldn't leave it there because of the children. In the end I got fed up with it, and we went squatting again.

'We've been here 11 weeks now. One of my children is having to live elsewhere. All we've heard from the Trust, apart from the court order, is when a bloke came round saying he was from the Times. We only learnt afterwards that he runs the Trust as well. I wouldn't have let him in if I'd known. I'm quite willing to pay rent, but they haven't asked me.

'I've been on the waiting list nine years now, but the Housing Department has always said they can't give me a new house, only reconditioned ones. At one time we were on the priority list, but they've taken us off now. »

LORD DENNING'S STATEMENT GO AHEAD FOR "ARMED EVICTION SQUADS" ?

Lord Denning, Master of the Rolls, said at an appeal court hearing, that landlords need not apply to the courts to evict squatters.

Henry Hodge of the Citizens' Rights Office said, "It means bad news for squatters, because landlords who choose to react unreasonably to squatting will now feel free to evict squatter - s themselves, by whatever means they choose, without having first to go to the courts."

Trevor Howell, of the Family Squatting Advisory Service, (FSAS) disagreed, "Basically the situation is that a landlord can evict occupants of his property if he has entered the property peaceably. He can then use reasonable force to put squatters out. But he cannot do anything if he doesn't get in."

School: W.Indian and Working Class Kids

3

Hackney Young Teachers' Association recently held a meeting on the subject of "West Indian Problems."

'It was decided to talk about this subject due to the high proportion of black children in our classes in Hackney and yet the low percentage of black teachers.'

Jim Wright gave a short account of his research at the Centre for Urban Educational Studies. He found out that the difficulties pinpointing specifically to W.Indian children were usually identical to those mentioned by teachers teaching in all white working class areas and that accounts of problems relating specifically to W.Indian children contained interested contradictions. W.Indian children were said to be characteristically withdrawn and dumb. Teachers also complained that W.Indian children were chatterboxes who were over-excited. It was said that they were natural and flowing in their movements and also that they were poorly co-ordinated. Some of the difficulties created by the lack of communication between the school and the families concerned were brought up by a black education welfare officer. He suggested that there was a conflict in educational values between teachers and W.Indian parents who had after all come over here to better themselves and expected to see results from the educative or schooling experience and were instead faced with a system in which most of their children were failing.

We then began to look more closely at the inadequacy of our system as regards these children.

'It's this problem of child minding that worries me and the children coming home from school letting themselves in with a key and then the telly goes straight on and there's no speech. We need more nursery education.'

'Schools and parents need very much closer contact. This is particularly important in explaining to W.Indian parents the way in which our schools are run, what our aims are, how we're going about it and most important the part that play has in school and in the pre-school child as well, and the completely different forms of discipline we value.'

'I think some W.Indian parents have a Victorian attitude which seems to be spare the rod and spoil the child. Although they are often very loving to their children, I think they are also more ready to beat them.'

'When some W.Indian children come up against teachers it's another world. They think we're soft because we don't beat them.'

'A lot of W.Indian children I think are to be seen and not heard. Most spend all Sunday at Sunday school. They have the idea of original sin. If there's a child in the family causing behaviour problems they tend to write him off as being bad.'

'Some come to school late because of parties. They seem to be included much more as part of the family and therefore attend family gatherings.'

'Will nursery schools work? Wouldn't it be better to pay the mothers not to work?'

'School life in the West Indies is very formal. They all wear uniforms. Many of our West Indian children come to school in grey tunics. I have an idea there are mainly male teachers in primary schools out there but I'm not sure.'



'I feel some of these children, they can't cope with relatively free situations. Let them explore under your direction first. You can't expect the child to choose. You meet a blank if you ask him to.'

'The problems will apply anywhere where housing is overcrowded.'

'The black parents I have seen have been terrific - it's just been an adult relationship. They have the same kind of concern as the old working class cockney. There was something mysterious about adult education but they always knew it was important. They never had it and they wanted to make sure their kids got it. They are very much like cockneys. They have ordinary jobs - bus driver, carpenter, saw mill worker, lorry driver, builder just like cockney families but they come from different origins..high rent and bad housing..they have the same sort of troubles.'

'They seem not to tolerate violence in their children.'

'Just as with white children, you never see the parents you really need to see.'

-A random sample of statements teachers in local schools.

Schools vary a great deal in the ways in which they approach children's speech. Some bully children more than others. Some respect their social and emotional lives more than others. There is often a condescending attitude to the so-called impoverishment of working class language white and black. It is seen as a sort of illness which must be cured or treated, either because of future exams or because it is 'restricted'.

The condescending attitude of some middle class educationalists towards the language of working class children and parents, black and white is partly due to a misunderstanding of the theories of Basil Bernstein, which then makes the sad equation that poor language equals working class impoverishment in a never ending circle. This attitude is doubly tragic because it helps to maintain the

language of middle class teachers are clearly different in some ways from those of working class black families. The differences can be exaggerated. In this respect class cuts right across colour.

Several infant teachers at the meeting complained that reading schemes in use in their school did not include black children at all either in the pictures or the writing. Others felt that personally more discussion was needed on the Caribbean in the classroom. Some felt it was useful to bring into discussion material from many different cultures.

Coard calls it 'criminal negligence' or 'prejudice' that black culture and history are excluded. From most curricula it would be almost equally silly to make it compulsory as he suggests. Considering that there are a majority of white teachers in Hackney secondary schools I wonder how practical a proposal that could be.

Most children unfortunately learn a history which has little to do with their lives or the lives of anyone but the significant few Kings, merchants, politicians and inventors who are implied to have caused man to march forward to his present state of perfection and glory. A lot of these junior and secondary problems might be by-passed if schools in Hackney could work together more. i.e. if older children, say at secondary level, could bring their work and discuss it with infant and junior children and vice-versa. If we could pool our resources our work might be truly cultural, the living culture of Hackney children.

The notion of introducing black studies is fraught with dangers as Fanon said (Black Face White Masks) I do not want to exalt my past at the expense of my future.



The name of Bernard Coard, the author of "How the W.Indian Child is Made Educationally Sub-Normal in the British school system" came up in several contexts. He urges W.Indian parents to visit schools wherever possible, 'as it isn't always or only the child's fault if he isn't succeeding'.

exam system in all its immorality and because it checks the child-centred advances made so bravely by our infant and nursery schools.

As Harold Rosen points out (Language and Class): 'Working class speech has its own strengths, which the normal linguistic technology has not been able to catch. The language acquired through education can conceal deserts of ignorance; moreover the middle class have often to pay a price for the acquisition of certain kinds of transactional language and that is loss of vitality and expressiveness and obsession with proprieties.'

As teachers we are likely to be seen as representatives of Authority and Bureaucracy by some members of the immigrant community and their place, if Coard is right, is clear to them: 'The West Indian community constitutes an unskilled labour force and because of our low wages and our widespread experience of prejudice most of us are forced to live in run-down overcrowded areas with the least amenities'. This is the crux of the problem regarding the lack of dialogue between the West Indian cultural environment and the school.

When teachers from one culture teach children from another there are inevitably difficulties in communicating. The experiences and

4 THE MATCHGIRLS' STRIKE 1888

The matchgirls' strike of 1888, when the girls went on strike in protest against the low wages and appalling working conditions in Bryant and May's East London factory was an historic turning point in the development of British Trade Unionism. Before 1888 the old craft unions had dominated the field, and were so heavily oriented towards the benevolent fund and friendly society aspects of trades unionism that they were hardly more than 'sick and burial clubs' or, as they came to be called, 'coffin clubs'. These unions with their concern for their 'benefits' jealously preserved their funds and were afraid of the financial consequences of supporting strikes, even against wage cuts or increased hours.

THE NEW UNIONS

But in the 1880s new and influential craftsmen trade unionists were appearing, highly critical of the old union policies; men like Tom Mann and John Burns, who saw unions not as benefit societies but as instruments for social change, and who were turning to socialism to solve the perpetual crises of capitalism. Basing their unionism on the concept of class solidarity they looked beyond the confines of craft unionism to the mass of unskilled and unorganised workers, and campaigned for a 'new trade unionism' that would embrace the semiskilled and the labourers. A new spirit developed which was to culminate in the events of 1888-9: the Bryant and May's matchgirls strike, the organisation of the London gas workers by Will Thorne and the revolt of the London dockers led by Ben Tillet, bringing a new vigour and dynamic to the building of trade unionism.

THE MATCHGIRLS

The Matchgirls' strike of 1888, a strike of unskilled, down-trodden, previously unorganised workers was, as Engels said, "the light jostle needed for the entire avalanche to follow."

Match making and jam making were the 2 industries that employed most women in the East End—they went jam making in summer and into the match factories in winter. The women who made the match boxes at home earned 2½d a gross of finished boxes. The girls who worked in the factory making the matches earned between 4/- and 13/- a week. The shareholders of Bryant and May were paid a dividend of 20% on their investment.

The Fabian society in London, one of whose members was Annie Besant, began at this time to take an interest in the problems and conditions of female labour. Annie Besant consequently went down to the Bryant and May factory in Bow to discuss their problems with the girls working in the factory. They were only too ready to talk to her. They told her that the low wages were bad enough but that they rarely even saw the whole of the money due to them—you could be fined for dropping matches, fined for answering back, were never allowed to talk, fined for having dirty feet, fined for leaving burnt matches on a bench. The fines varied from 3d to 1/-. The girls making the phosphorous matches complained less about the fines than the risk of getting what they called 'phossy-jaw'—a disease of the jaw which often set in because the girls' hands became infected with phosphorous thru' handling the freshly made matches—the phosphorous got onto the benches, and as the girls brought their dinner to work, and had nowhere to eat it except the workrooms, the food itself was often contaminated.

ILLEGAL FINES

Annie told the girls that she would complain to the factory inspector about the fines, which were illegal, and advised the girls to demand proper washrooms, regular lunch hours and a separate dining room. She subsequently published an article about the girls' plight in her paper 'The Link' called 'White Slavery in London'. The Bryant directors decided to sue for libel.

The factory inspector found the girls' allegations about illegal fines to be correct, and these were stopped. By this point the employers were incensed, and they attempted to intimidate the girls—they tried to make them sign documents saying that all was well in the factory. Then the employers dismissed a number of girls who they suspected of being 'ringleaders' in the strike.

VICTIMISATION

This attempt at victimisation was the flashpoint. All the 1400 women employed in Bryant's factories came out on strike, suddenly united in a common cause. This development astonished Annie Besant and embarrassed the Fabians, who preferred 'legalistic' methods rather than direct action. But the strike was solid.



The Times declared that the girls had been misled by a socialist clique who were, in reality, their worst enemies. However, due to the favourable publicity given to the girls' cause in other papers, notably the Star and the Pall Mall Gazette, and the raising of questions in Parliament, public sympathy for the girls grew. Meanwhile Annie Besant wrote to Bryant's shareholders, many of whom were clergymen, berating them for getting such high dividends on the basis of the workers' starvation. Contributions from the public to the girls' strike fund were large enough to enable the girls to hold out; and the adverse publicity they were getting weakened Bryant and May's position.

VICTORY

Eventually the London Trades Council took up the matter and offered to arbitrate in the dispute. The LTC arranged a meeting between the employers and the girls at which Bryant's agreed to recognise the girls union which had formed during the strike, with Annie Besant as its secretary.

The Pall Mall gazette congratulated the girls on "A great and noble victory!" Beatrice and Sidney Webb in their 'History of Trade Unionism' said: "The matchgirls' victory turned a new leaf in trade union annals. It was a new experience for the weak to succeed. The lesson was not lost on other workers!"

ORGANISATION

The assistance provided by Socialist leaders, like Annie Besant, both in publicity and in organisation was to be a feature of the foundation of the 'new unions' which followed the matchgirls' victory. In March of the following year 1889, Will Thorne began to organise a union among his fellow workers at the Beckton Gas Works at East Ham and he received a good deal of clerical assistance from Karl Marx' daughter Eleanor. Thorne led the men in a successful struggle for an eight hour day, and at a meeting in Victoria Park on 20 May 1889, 2,000 gasworkers launched the Amalgamated Society of Gasworkers.

THE DOCK STRIKE

On 13 August 1889 the great Dock Strike began, led by Ben Tillet and John Burns. This was the struggle for the dockers' tanner. It was again a strike of unskilled, previously unorganised workers, and they proclaimed on their banner that "This is a holy war, and we shall not cease until all destitution, prostitution and exploitation is swept away" When at the successful conclusion of the strike, the full round orb of the dockers' tanner rose over the horizon the Dock, Wharf, Riverside and General Labourers' Union grew rapidly, adding 200,000 members in one year. This union thrown up by the dockers strike, was one of the cornerstones from which the TGWU, as we know it today, was later to emerge.

A NEW POWER

The impetus of the new unionism of 1889 was carried forward to unite the lesser skilled workers into powerful industrial groups. These new unions differed from the old both in tactics and in organisation. Catering largely for unskilled and poorly paid workers, the new unions had low entrance fees and depended not on benefits but on aggressive strike tactics to win concessions from their employers and so keep their members satisfied; they were indeed, in their contribution to the Labour movement, 'instruments for social change'.

Produced by Hackney People's
Autobiography Group

THE MATCHGIRLS STRIKE 1888 AND THE CLEANERS STRIKE 1972-AN INTERVIEW WITH MAY HOBBS AND HELEN BORROWS OF THE CLEANERS ACTION GROUP:

"In all my years in the trade union movement I've never come across conditions like those in the contract cleaning business. It's like something out of the 19th century." -J.Vickers, General secretary of the Civil Service Union, 1970.

THE CLEANERS STRIKE

When the cleaners at the Ministry of Defence building in Fulham came out on strike on July 30 1972 and the cleaners' strike began, which later spread to the Admiralty building in Whitehall and the Horseferry House annex of the Home Office, the situation of the women workers was in many respects similar to that of the matchgirls in 1888. Pay was abominably low, working conditions were bad and the women largely unorganised. That they were able to press their strike to a successful conclusion within 3 weeks led them to discover, just as the matchgirls had done 84 years earlier, the power of union organisation.

The cleaners' militancy, like that of the matchgirls, was in many ways forced upon them. As one of them put it: "Who could say we're militant, since we've worked this building for 6 years without any fuss? But it comes to a point where you can't take any more; you realise that if you don't stand up for yourself no-one else will."

MAY HOBBS

May Hobbs and Helen Borrows, members of the Cleaners' AC Action Group which formed as a result of the strike, pointed to many of the parallels between the matchgirls' strike and the cleaners' strike in a recent interview.

MH "I learnt about the match girls before I ever got in to anything to do with Trade Unions I learnt about them as a little girl from my mum ... then when I came home that dinnertime and told her we were coming out at the beginning of the cleaners strike she made a remark about it..."



MATCHGIRLS ON STRIKE IN 1888.

ANNIE BESANT

MH "She was such a marvellous woman, Annie Besant... She was a true socialist, because she gave up everything to do what she could for those girls. She was an incredible woman, not many even today could go down outside a factory gate and actually get the people to listen and talk to you. She must have really had a deep feeling for what she was doing, and not a 'do-good' thing either.... to have actually gone down there and made contact and got the girls to do what they did ... she actually went in as if she was one of them and the girls must have really related to her; and don't forget it was a damn sight harder for a working girl to relate to a middle class lady in them days .. even during the cleaners strike the women were very reluctant to talk to people who came down there unless they knew them already People will say the matchgirls wanted to come out on strike themselves; they did, but Annie Besant did instigate it... she put it into their minds, though she left it to them to decide. The only thing was though, that at the end of it all, when they formed the matchgirls' union Annie Besant ended up as secretary of it herself - she didn't manage to get any of the girls themselves to take up the position of 'leader' she ended up doing things for them, a bit.... its like the situation in our branch of the cleaners union ... ok I'll be the branch secretary for a little while but eventually they've got to do it themselves because it's them, not me who's got to do it, I'm not even cleaning anymore... people have got to do things for themselves



CLEANERS ON STRIKE IN 1972.

es, otherwise you end up in the position of a kind of social worker, you can't carry other people like that..."

PARALLELS

In both the matchgirls and the cleaners strikes the employers response was to try and weed out the workers that they thought were the ringleaders and in both cases these attempts at victimisation by the employers only served to escalate the strike and increase the women's militancy. Again, in both cases the increasing militancy of the strikers as they came to realise their power reflected itself in the widening of their demands to include not only pay but also questions of working conditions.

WOMENS MILITANCY

MH "People don't realise that women are so militant once they get going .. in any strike that goes on in this country, women are behind it... the papers are always talking about women telling their husbands to get back to work but they're only telling you about the minority... Women all the time have been militant, its just that they've been so downtrodden... all of a sudden its supposed to be a new thing in the last 4 or 5 years since Womens Liberation has been about that the women have actually been militant... you only have to look back to the Chartists in the 1940s and the part that women played then... look at the part played by women in the strikes of 1911 when 1000s of them just left the small factories in the East End and came out on strike spontaneously.... "

UNION PROBLEMS

HB "Sometimes men trade unionists are the worst at keeping their women down ... men's line is always: "We'll have women in our movement when they're prepared to toe the line (and be militant!)" but what they forget is the history of trade union activity, which has always been employers using women as cheap labour and the men keeping them out of their unions- that is why we have the situation we have today- men never realised that the only way to combat this is to bring the women into their organisations- even when the women asked to come in they said no we don't want you- you give your labour cheap. The women had no choice- they had to support their kids!"

CLEANERS ACTION GROUP

On December 12 1972 a historic meeting took place in London to set up the first London Transport and General Workers' Union branch for cleaners. The Cleaners' Action Group of the Union states its aims for the future as follows:

"The main task before us now is, of course, the continuation and strengthening of the recruitment campaign and building up communications. The second task is to build on and strengthen the organisation of cleaners within the Unions; to understand and use the facilities provided by those trade unions. The third main task before us, and probably the most difficult, is to campaign for the ending of 'contract' cleaning and all the problems it provides."

The Cleaners' Action Group can be contacted at 13, Middle Lane, N.8. 348-3594.

6 Since the playground in Downham Rd. in De Beauvoir estate unofficially opened just before easter, the site has been developed quite considerably. A large number of children of various ages, particularly from the flats in De Beauvoir New Town and the surrounding area have come to play on it. It provides a space where they can continually use their creative energies, building underground camps, tree houses, etc. with any materials that come to hand - old pieces of wood, corrugated iron, old mattresses and so on have been made into elaborate structures which grow and change continually.

So far the site has been staffed entirely by local parents and volunteers during the evenings and at weekends. The council has as yet offered little in the way of help or encouragement, and their lack of interest until now is shown by the fact that they recently denied knowledge of the existence of the playground despite extensive correspondence about it over a year. We have been more fortunate, however with the ILEA, which has given us a grant for the summer vacation of £225 - which will enable us to employ one full time playleader but will leave little left over for materials and equipment.

The need for more playgrounds of this type is great, particularly in the De Beauvoir area. There are several vacant plots standing empty in the locality, waiting ostensibly for redevelopment (in 1984 perhaps?) which could be turned into playsites if help and money were available. The difficulties of running a playground on a voluntary basis are immense and we greatly need help over the summer to take kids on outings, develop projects, and generally to be around to help out with the kids. Any volunteers please contact Frances at 249-2353.

DE BEAUVOIR PLAYGROUND



WORLD DEVELOPMENT ?

Many articles have appeared in 'Hackney People's Press' about the need for the people to have a say in the decisions which affect their lives. The Hackney and Islington World Development Action Group tries to speak up for people who have even less say in their future than most of us, people in the poor countries of the world whose whole life is often affected by decisions taken by our government in our name. The needs of these people have no weight when these decisions are made; strong countries impose their wishes on weaker countries or reach agreements with governments of weaker countries which themselves are often concerned with the interests of only a few of their citizens. The World Development Action Group, with over 100 more such groups throughout the country, applies pressure on the greatest barrier to a juster world, the will of the rich countries of the world.

POPULAR MYTHS

There are many popular myths about why poor countries are poor; often the same reasons are given for people being poor within this country. Few readers of 'Hackney People's Press' would take seriously that people in Hackney are poor because they are lazy or

have too many children or whatever the present favourite reason is, but people will readily accept that these are the reasons why people are poor in India or Africa or South America. Yet the reasons, or some of them, are the same in both cases - that those with power and wealth arrange matters to their own advantage, whether they are a class within a country or countries within the so-called family of nations, like our own.

INJUSTICE

There are three good reasons why we must fight hard to change the inequality and injustice which we in the rich countries are imposing. One is simply that the present situation is evil. Another is that the inequality and injustice will surely bring violence and disaster on us all in the end. And the third is that several of our present policies are against the interests of all but a few of us anyhow. As examples we can take sugar imports and textile imports.

We buy two thirds of our sugar from Commonwealth countries. Several have little else to sell overseas and much of it is grown by small farmers on their own farms. European farmers want to keep out this cane sugar and sell us beet sugar, at a higher

price. Even if our government stands firm against this change, the price of cane sugar will still be raised to be the same as beet sugar. And who gets the extra? Not those cane farmers but the bureaucrats of Brussels. So the British housewife and the cane sugar farmer should be allies.

If you've noticed fewer cheap cotton shirts from overseas in the shops of late, the reason is that the government decided we must buy more British goods - at a higher price. The reason? British manufacturers said they need protection while they organize themselves. They were warned to get on with it in 1948! Since then their inefficiency has lost the market steadily to overseas manufacturers in Europe and Asia. But the government didn't dare to keep out imports from European countries which are strong enough to hit back, and just penalized the poor countries. So the rich countries can still export as many cotton goods to us as they can sell, while the poor ones have had both a limit on quantity put on their goods and a tariff to increase the price. They and the consumer carry the can for the failure of the British industry and government to sort themselves out. What is more the big efficient companies have been reducing their work force and increasing their profits, so the workers haven't gained much protection by these moves.

MIGHT IS RIGHT

These are two of the main issues in the programme which the World Development Movement is running from now till November to 'Turn Europe Inside Out', and make it more concerned with the needy and less with the interests of its own businessmen. Much of Britain's wealth came from sugar and cotton, grown by slaves. And cotton exports from Britain wrecked the Indian textile industry. Are we going to continue with the policy that might is right and wealth brings more wealth, or give the poor a chance to earn their living?

ACTION GROUP

The world Development Action Group studies issues like these and publicises them by articles, talks, exhibitions and street theatre, and presses by letter-writing and lobbying for a fairer deal for those who have no other voice in this country. We need all the help we can get to change the world.

John Wilding.

Hackney and Islington World Development Action Group.

43, Lordship Park, N16 5Un.

information

Hackney Claimants Union

For help in all matters concerning social security. Meetings 12.30 Wed. Office 2-5 Tues & Thu at Centerprise.

Homerton Claimants Union

5 Templemead House, Kingsmead Estate Centre, Homerton Rd, E9. 985-3987. Meetings Mon. 7.30-10pm Office Mon & Fri 10.30-12am



Legal Aid and Advice If you need it just ask

Free aid and advice on housing, legal and social security. Thursday 6.30-7.30 at Centerprise.

'Servant of the People' M.P.'s

Your one can be found, or so we're told, at the following addresses and times:

Stoke-Newington and Hackney North.
David Weitzman, 40 Stamford Hill N16.806-3718. Fri. 7.15-8.15. Sun. 11.30-12.30.
Hackney Central.
S. Clinton Davis, 14a Graham Rd, E8.254-3285. Fri. 7.30-8.15.
Bethnal Green (part).
W.S. Hilton, 349 Cambridge Heath Rd. E2.739-7768.
Shoreditch & Finsbury (part).
R. Brown, 108 Shephardess Walk, N1. 253-1556.

Committee Against Racism

The committee is a delegate body to which individual members can affiliate. Now more than three years old the monthly meetings are held at 7.45pm on the first Wednesday of every month at Community Relations Office, Mare St.

Committee for a Better Environment

Meets in the lounge of Queen Mary Hostel, by Hoxton Hall, 128 Hoxton St. at 7.45pm on the third Wed. of every month.

Y.C.N.D.

Would anyone interested in forming a Hackney Y.C.N.D. group please contact: Clare Smith, 108 Dalston Lane, E8.254-1926.

Homeless Action Campaign

Any groups or individuals who are interested in getting together to fight the homelessness and bad housing conditions in Hackney and nationally please contact Leighton Evans 986-3123 x6433.

St. Matthias Playgroup

The St. Matthias playgroup Wordsworth Rd. N16. will be opening in September on three afternoons in addition to the morning sessions. Anyone that is interested in a place for their child please call in at the hall one morning and see Liz or Maggie for more details.

Driver Wanted

Have you got a heavy goods licence? Do you know anyone who has? Hackney playbus has to be moved every morning Mon-Fri at 9.45 from the garage to Kingsmead estate. At lunchtime it has to be moved to De Beauvoir and then back to the garage at 3.30 £2 per day or £1 per session. Temp or perm. Please contact: Fran Crowther at 254-1620

After Six

6 Tyssen Road. N16. 249-2847. Information service for the homeless. They try to find accomadation on a short-term basis. Ring after 6pm.

If you want any information inserted please send by 10th of each month.

Silkscreen Workshop

The workshop is now open and ready to be used by local groups and people who want to print posters, cards, T-shirts and all sorts of things. The workshop is well equipped. There is also an expert printer. And for advice and help. The facilities are provided free so the only expense is for the materials used. It is open to teach and work with people: Wed. 10am-1.30pm & 6pm-8pm. Thur. 2pm-6pm. For more information anyone interested should come to the workshop at 81 Len-thall Rd, E8.

Rising Free

Kings Cross Rd. WC1. 837-0182. Rising Free is an information service which took over from Agitprop. The group hopes to act as a source of information and ideas to 'counteract the propaganda of the straight press and media'. The group has also set up a library which includes a wide collection of papers and pamphlets collected by Agitprop.

Half Moon Theatre & Gallery

27 Alie St. E1. 480-6465. (Aldgate Tube)
From 10th July-28th July: 'Fall in and follow me'. A play about the children's strike of 1911. Performances 7.30pm. Matinees 2.30pm Wed-Sat. Adults 50p, children 30p.

Theatre Royal Stratford

Salway Rd. E15 534-0310.
To 21 July: 'Nuts'. Performances start 8pm Tues-Sun. Two perform. on Sat. 5pm & 8pm. Seats: £1.50, £1.50p.

Whitechapel Gallery

Whitechapel High st. E1. 247-1942
Until the 7th August an exhibition from Chelsea Art School.

Unity Theatre

1 Goldington St. NW1. 387-8647.
Until July 21st: 'Tom Barker' the story of one of the founder members of the 'Wobblies' (industrial workers of the world) Subsequent performances Fri, Sat Suns, at 7.45pm.

Exhibitions

There will be a photographic exhibition about the Shoreditch Park Adventure Playground at Centerprise 34 & 66 Dalston Lane. until 7th July. Slide show on request and video tape on Sats. 25th June-16th July an exhibition of paintings by Albert Loudon. 16th July - 28th July an exhibition of the paintings by Charles Palmer of Stoke-Newington.

Hackney Workers

Educational Association
A People's Autobiography of Hackney. A project using tape recorders and cameras to collect people's recollections of life in our area earlier in this century. Course meetings: 4th, 18th July at Centerprise 8pm

Housing Project

Any local person interested in joining a group that is getting up a house for the homeless young people in the Dalston area please contact: Bill Henderson. work: 254 9671 home: 247 3761

LEARNING EXCHANGE PROGRESS REPORT⁷

Since the report in Hackney Peoples Press No1 about the Learning Exchange at Centerprise, these have been two important developments. PARENTS NEED HELP WITH THEIR CHILDRENS READING The Learning Exchange has had many reports from parents who want help with their childrens reading. Two primary schools in the area have taken up the idea of advising the parents on how to help their children read. They are inviting parents into the schools with their children in the evenings for an hours session. In each session parents and kids are shown how to find out exactly what help they need and what they can do about it. There are the obvious things to do - for parents to read to the

kids and the kid to read to his parents; but the sessions do more than this - for example, one evenings session can help to find out if a kid gets stuck on words with STR in them and give him and his parents a chance to concentrate on STR words until the kid is happy about them.

SCHOOL DROPOUTS NEED HELP

THE other development is that the L.E. has been asked by social workers to find people who want to help school dropouts. This shows just how much our local schools are failing to get through to some kids and how little is being done to help matters outside the schools.

If you are a parent or kid interested in the reading scheme a school dropout or sympathiser and want to help, ring DOROTHY WISE at CENTERPRISE 254- 7514

MUSIC WORKSHOP STARTING

Due partly to the success of the W.E.A. music course, and partly to the realisation that there are a load of budding musicians living in Hackney who got very disillusioned playing on their own and not making contact with anybody. The W.E.A. are planning to set up a music workshop which would cater for anyone in Hackney who plays or is interested in learning to play an instrument. An aim of the workshop would also be to get people playing together and to broaden peoples' knowledge of music and playing. We hope that

the workshop will involve people playing all kinds of music, blues, jazz, folk etc. and maybe even teaching people who can't play. We already have quite a number of accomplished musicians who are willing to teach, along with people like John Peel and Bob Harris who have agreed to come along and give talks similar to those given on the music course. The workshop will be held one evening a week but as yet we haven't been able to find a hall. If you are interested contact: Steve Horrigan at Centerprise 254-1620.



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Stonebridge Tenants Take Direct Action Over Dumped—Car Menace

Several Estates in Hackney must have the same trouble as we have in Stonebridge, that is to say abandoned, broken down death traps, which apparently are, or were cars. We had five which were left in the parking area for almost two and a half months. The council, after being notified by tenants and the caretaker told us that there was nothing they could do, that we had to go to the police, and vice-versa. This we did, four times, until eventually one of these "cars" was set alight by older children. Six toddlers were sitting in the vehicle at the time, one of tenants managed to get them out before it exploded into flames only a few seconds later. As a result of this we delivered an ultimatum to the council, either they be removed or we shall remove them ourselves, within two days. This notice, was of course ignored, so they, a group of tenants, and a much larger group of children got together and pushed the "cars" into the middle of Kingsland Road, which blocked for a couple of miles either way. After this the police decided to take action, they came (also in a large crowd) and pushed them out of one street and into the side of another, and they were left there, abandoned, for another four days.

Following this the council put notices on two of the cars that were left on the estate, as they belonged to tenants, that they would be removed seven days later, if the tenants did not remove them themselves. The date expired on the 15th. June 1973, but again they are still there today.

As a result of this drastic but necessary action the tenants have come to realise that if you wait for things to be done your children can be killed or maimed, so now they are making sure that there children have safer means of amusing themselves, and pooled together to buy a paddling pool for the toddlers, and have also approached Councillor Wilson about the use of a flat for a playgroup and youth centre, which will of course not solve the problems of living on a very large estate, but we hope will certainly improve things there. Also the Council have come to realise that our estate is no longer a zoo, where the areas are cleared out occasionally, but we are humans wanting respectable and safe houses.

A notice to other estates, please remember we are paying the council, they are not paying us, so don't let them dictate to you.

Mrs. Isabel Papagno.

